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Pastora appeal stresses triumph

By Roger Fontaine
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Eden Pastora, the flamboyant commander of the Nicaraguan resistance's southern front, in his usual, unorthodox manner, has written President Reagan a letter strongly supporting the president's efforts and warning against appeasement with "the communist forces" holding power in Managua.

A copy of that letter was made available to The Washington Times yesterday.

Mr. Pastora, better known as Comandante Zero, fought against Anastasio Somoza. And unlike most of his former comrades among the Sandinistas who now occupy the old dictator's bunker, he fought on the ground rather than from a safe sanctuary.

In the letter to President Reagan, Mr. Pastora thanks the president for his past support and outlines his movement's objectives:

- "Withdrawal of Cuban, Soviet and other communist forces from Nicaragua".

- "Reduction of Nicaragua's communist armed forces, which oppress the Nicaraguan people and threaten Nicaragua's neighbors".

- "An end to the export of subversion from Nicaragua, which would be the logical consequence of achieving the first two objectives."

In the bluntest possible language, Mr. Pastora also warns the president

about accommodation and negotiation with "the communists" — the term he uses in the letter whenever referring to the Sandinistas.

"Many in your State Department and your Congress believe that you can negotiate successfully with communists, but even they must concede that you must negotiate from a position of strength," he wrote.

Mr. Pastora rejects the belief that his forces or other resistance groups should now negotiate with the Sandinista regime — a position that has been fostered by the United States as well as by Nicaraguan bishops and unarmed opposition groups in Nicaragua.

"Why would the junta deal with Nicaragua's freedom fighters if they can crush them militarily? Can anyone find an example of communist concessions to a weak opponent?"

Mr. Pastora's questions are not those of a diplomat or even a professional manager of violence engaged in low-intensity conflict. He is, after all, engaged in a life-and-death struggle that for him has only winners and losers. He also has the advantage of knowing his former colleagues far better than anyone else does — in or out of the American government.

"The communist objective is to destroy us, and negotiations are one

weapon in that battle," Mr. Pastora says.

His letter also spells out what his forces need. Being a shrewd reader of Washington politics and an astute practitioner of psychological warfare, Mr. Pastora, like every successful guerrilla commander, clearly understands the most important battle is being waged now in Washington.

Of course, Nicaragua's Sandinista regime also recognizes the significance of the political encounter in Washington and has joined its allies in mounting an enormous propaganda campaign keyed to the April congressional vote on aid to Nicaragua's resistance forces.

While Mr. Pastora scores "the defeatists" in Mr. Reagan's government, he also assures the president he intends to win — an outcome which some of Washington's armchair guerrillas have long written off.

The Nicaraguan resistance leader claims 7,000 fighters controlling 10,000 square miles "as well as an internal front."

Significantly, he links his efforts with the forces of the Nicaraguan Democratic Front, the FDN, who operate in the north. Both, he claims, continue to garner support, but they need weapons — "basic supplies and equipment," in his words.

Although he does not say so explicitly, it is apparent that he and the FDN are close now to being full-fledged allies. Pointedly, Mr. Pastora omits any reference to so-called "somocista" (pro-Somoza) elements within the FDN — a major sticking point in the past.

Furthermore, while he admits to disagreements within the ranks of the resistance, he also argues that "that is normal for democratic people. He paints, in short, a picture that bears little resemblance to the one that usually depicts an opposition hopelessly divided.



Resistance leader Eden Pastora (left).

Instead he says, "we share ... a common objective of gaining control over our own destiny and achieving a society of freedom and justice, as you have in the United States."

Meanwhile, if the United States does not act, his warning is stark: All of Central America will in time become communist.

"If we lose," he adds, "American blood will be spilled, no matter what liberal Congressmen say today. No North American administration can tolerate a communist Central America."